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AUTHOR Hale, Steve; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Evaluated in two field tests with 50 regular teachers was a set of eight instructional modules designed to develop the competencies of regular teachers involved in mainstreaming handicapped children as part of Project SERT (Special Education for Regular Teachers). The following modules were developed: comprehensive special education, formal appraisal, team planning for student program management, informal assessment, organizing content for individual differences, materials selection, classroom management, and evaluation of instruction. Results of the validation process supported the following conclusions: content of the modules was regarded as helpful by regular teachers, both delivery systems (either summer workshop or semester course) were effective in producing perceived competence among participants, participants shared information and ideas with colleagues, there was a positive impact on participants' attitudes toward special education, and participants preferred the 2-week format. (DB)

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PROJECT S.E.R.T. - SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR REGULAR TEACHERS

Steve Hale, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Special Education
East Texas State University
Commerce, Texas

E. Hayes Prothro, Chief Consultant
Special Education Personnel Development
Division of Special Education Development
Texas Education Agency
Austin, Texas

Jim George, Ed.D.
Director
Special Educational Services Department
Region 10 Education Service Center
Richardson, Texas

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PROJECT S.E.R.T. - SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR REGULAR TEACHERS

Introduction

The state of Texas is currently in a period of transition with regard to the provision of special educational services for public school students. With the advent of the State Plan for Comprehensive Special Education in 1970, the Texas Education Agency initiated a major move toward more adequate services for handicapped children and youth. While many facets of the plan indicate improved services for handicapped children, Project S.E.R.T. is directed toward that aspect of the plan which encourages the reintegration of some mildly handicapped students into the mainstream of education. The regular classroom teacher must be prepared to accept these students back into mainstream educational settings.

Through an improved system for allocation of funds and the provision of sufficient additional resources for such items as appraisal, consultative assistance and acquisition of materials, Comprehensive Special Education (Plan A) encourages local school districts to evaluate very carefully each individual who might need special instructional services and assign each person to the most appropriate educational setting, including mainstream education when possible. Of course, a wide range of specialized services are available for the handicapped learner; however, the school district is urged to leave the student in the regular classroom setting whenever he can benefit from that experience. As one might suspect, there has been a concentrated statewide effort to prepare resource room, appraisal and materials personnel since the inception of Plan A.

Attempts to develop the competencies of the regular classroom teachers required for successful implementation of the mainstreaming facet of Plan A, however, have been sporadic at best. While these people are being required to accept the joint responsibility for providing special educational services to handicapped children, there are as yet few provisions being made to acquaint them with the basic system of Plan A much less equipping them with the skills and competencies essential to effective execution of that responsibility. This project is addressed primarily to the development of a system for preparing regular classroom teachers to function effectively in their role of teaching some handicapped students in the regular classroom.

The Special Educational Services Department of Region 10 Education Service Center* has received a grant from the United States Office of Education Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. The grant proposal was submitted with the endorsement of the Executive Board of EPD Consortium D (A coalition of four ESC's embracing 49 counties and including the 18 institutions of higher education and 359 school districts located in those 49 counties) and the Special Education Division of the Texas Education Agency. In accordance with the proposal, the Special

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*ESC 10 is one of twenty regional education service centers established by the State of Texas in 1967 to strengthen the public education system through cooperative services.

Region 10 encompasses Collin, Dallas, Ellis, Fannin, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman and Rockwall counties in the North Texas area and serves approximately 375,000 students in 81 school districts.

The Center program, authorized by the 59th and 60th Legislatures, is designed to provide specialized educational services in response to the needs of each school district. Programs are offered in academic services, administrative services, business services, computer services, driver education, instructional media and special educational services.

Educational Services Department contracted with East Texas State University to assist in developing the teacher training system.

Personnel from both institutions along with several consultants established an outline of instructional modules to be used as the content for a two week summer workshop which involved approximately twenty regular classroom teachers. The primary intent of this workshop was the validation of the proposed content of the modular program. The validation process included:

1. Interview with teachers
2. Post seminar evaluation
3. Perceived competency inventory
4. Attitude inventory
5. Monthly reporting system

Following this validation process, eight instructional modules were developed and field tested with approximately thirty regular classroom teachers. This field test consisted of a semester length course, concentrating upon individual study and classroom application. University faculty members were available each week for consultation and assistance with the application of the material presented in the modules to the teachers' classrooms. Assessment of the modular materials focused upon the following items:

1. Perceived competency inventory
2. Attitude inventory
3. Post course evaluation

Results of the validation process for the two field tests supported the following conclusions:

1. Content of the modules was regarded as helpful by regular teachers.
2. Both delivery systems were effective in producing perceived competence among participants.
3. Participants shared information, ideas and techniques with their colleagues.
4. There was a positive impact on participants' attitudes toward special education.
5. Participants preferred the two week format.

Revision following the second field test produced a set of eight instructional modules as described below.

MODULE 1 - Comprehensive Special Education

Crucial factors in the regular teacher's entry into the Comprehensive Special Education framework are his appreciation of the individual needs which exist in his class and his understanding of how the framework can assist him in meeting those needs. This module has two basic objectives: a) the development of appreciation for individual differences in students and b) an understanding of the concepts of Comprehensive Special Education.

MODULE 2

At the outset of the regular teacher's involvement in the delivery of special services, he is likely to be overwhelmed with the vast amount of appraisal data generated on individual students and expressed in unfamiliar terminology. While he does not need to become an appraisal expert, the teacher does need to develop a

healthy respect for formal tests - both what they do and do not provide him in terms of instructional guidelines.

The major thrust of this module then is directed toward the regular teacher's acquisition of a working knowledge of the basic appraisal instruments useful in planning instructional strategies.

MODULE 3 - Team Planning for Student Program Management

Essential objectives of this module are a) to develop the teacher's understanding of the dependence of the Texas comprehensive plan upon the teamwork of special and regular educators; b) to assist the teacher to develop a facility for using the team concept as it is practiced in his school district; c) to aid the teacher in formulating the role he will be able to maintain on the educational team; and d) to enhance the teacher's development of effective communication techniques for team participation.

MODULE 4 - Informal Assessment

This module is intended to help the teacher develop techniques for identifying potential trouble spots within his own classroom. These techniques include (a) inventories of the essential skills and understandings necessary for adequate functioning in his subject or at his level; b) systematic observation skills for identifying those children whose overt behavior may indicate learning difficulties; and c) the use of social development and acceptance scales.

Primarily these competencies are directed toward making the regular classroom teacher a more efficient user of the referral system and a more reliable member of the Assignment, Review and Dismissal (ARD) Committee. Using these practices, he cannot only help to narrow down the referrals before they get to the ARD committee, but he can also present a more concrete and distinct picture to the committee as it begins its tasks.

MODULE 5 - Organizing Content for Individual Differences

If all the preliminary work of the ARD committee, diagnostic teacher, resource teacher and other specialists who have participated in identification of individual student needs and development of educational plans is to bear fruit, the regular classroom teacher must be able to follow through on the recommended programs. Basic to this ability is the teacher's recognition of the furdamental concepts and skills necessary for adequate student performance in the various content areas. Consequently, the objective of this module is to assist the teacher acquire a sequential or developmental framework of skills and understandings for organizing each of his instructional areas of responsibility.

MODULE 6 - Materials Selection

The provision of adequate budgetary resources for purchasing instructional materials and accompanying publication of a large variety of these resources have effectively eliminated "lack of materials" as an excuse for failing to provide individualized

instruction. Indeed there are sufficient goods on the market in most content areas to require the teacher to evaluate and select the most appropriate materials for accomplishing the desired goal rather than being restricted to one or two items and having to build a program around these. Thus the objectives of this module are directed toward those competencies of

a) familiarity with,
b) location of,
c) evaluation of and
d) development of

instructional resources.

MODULE 7 - Classroom Management

A traditional problem of the mildly handicapped youngster in regular education is the manifestation of overt social and attending behavior patterns inconsistent with the group norm. These behaviors themselves have frequently been the major reason for their being removed from the mainstream and placed in special classes. As such children are reintegrated into regular classes, teachers must acquire those competencies which will allow them to manage their classsrooms in such a way that disruptive behavior patterns do not reemerge.

MODULE 8 - Evaluation of Instruction

This module is focused upon follow-up of educational planning. Teachers should be skilled in monitoring student progress and evaluating their own performance; if plans for individual instruction are prepared with precision, they deserve a precise implementation. This requires continuous, systematic evaluation of the student's growth based upon the projections of his plan.

Also, it demands that the teacher compare his own performance to the instructional practices recommended for the student. This, of course, results in a form of audit for the educational plan of each student, "Did we do what we said we would and what has that action produced?" The competencies required to make the teacher a skillful auditor of classroom practices are the objectives of this package.

Steve Hale, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Special Education
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E. Hayes Prothro, Chief Consultant
Special Education Personnel Development
Division of Special Education Development
Texas Education Agency
Austin, Texas

Jim George, Ed.D.
Director
Special Educational Services Department
Region 10 Education Service Center
Richardson, Texas 75080